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# Preface

Each year the Federal Government invests billions of dollars in nutrition assistance for children and low-income people. For these resources to reach those in need, local communities all across the Nation must have an infrastructure that can deliver nutrition assistance benefits effectively. This infrastructure must enable current and prospective participants to:

- ▶ apply for and receive nutrition assistance benefits with dignity;
- ▶ redeem their benefits for nutritious and affordable food; and
- ▶ acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, and motivation to make the right choices for a healthful diet.

These are some of the basic elements of community food security—a concept that includes both a Federal nutrition assistance safety net and local organizational and policy structures that ensure that all community members have access to a safe, nutritious, and affordable food supply.

We designed this tool kit to help communities assess if they make full use of the Federal nutrition assistance programs, to identify barriers to the food security of community members, and to seek opportunities for improvement. It is a product of *Leadership 2000 and Beyond*, an effort to adopt quality management principles in our mission to improve the nutrition of the Nation’s population and end hunger. Its creation was a team effort, brought into existence by staff representing a cross-section of Food and Nutrition Service programs, regions, and offices:

Gary Bickel .....	Office of Analysis, Nutrition and Evaluation
Anita Cunningham .....	Food Stamp Program
Betty Dixon .....	Phoenix Field Office
Leigh Dyer .....	Communications and Government Affairs
Randall Harrison .....	Food Stamp Program, Midwest Region
Christine Kissmer .....	Office of Analysis, Nutrition and Evaluation
John Kwit .....	Special Nutrition Programs, Midwest Region
Tim Murphy .....	Seattle Field Office
Gina Rickhoff .....	Supplemental Nutrition Programs, Mountain Plains Region
Pam Washington .....	Information Technology Division

Steven Carlson, Team Leader

Alberta Frost, Quality Sponsor

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